



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
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Milwaukee Area Leaders Announce Intent to Remove Estabrook Dam

MILWAUKEE – Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, Milwaukee Alders Nik Kovac and Jim Bohl, John Hermes and Kevin Shafer of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, and Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele today released a joint letter of intent to take the steps necessary to remove the Estabrook Dam.

The letter, available to view in its entirety here [\[LINK TO PDF\]](#), reads in part:

“We believe strongly in local control and the ability of elected bodies to make informed decisions based on facts and to take votes that represent the wishes of their constituents. Unfortunately, this item has not come to a transparent vote for several years.

“It is still our preference for the County Board to take a vote to change the County’s policy on the Dam so that it can be removed as soon as possible. The Board’s vote will more quickly allow for the Dam’s removal so that County funds can be reallocated into important projects that benefit everyone, such as the county executive’s Urban Parks Initiative.

“Absent a Board vote, however, another solution is necessary to ensure that millions of dollars in taxpayer resources aren’t wasted on an unnecessary Dam that harms the environment and poses a potential flood risk.”

That solution to remove the Estabrook Dam requires the following steps:

- Rezoning – The land that surrounds the Dam will be rezoned by the City of Milwaukee, which will change the oversight to a three-member panel, including the County Executive, the County Comptroller and a representative of the City of Milwaukee. This panel has authority to sell public works properties through a majority vote.
- Selling the Dam – Once the Dam is rezoned by the City of Milwaukee, it will be sold to MMSD for \$1. The MOU between Milwaukee County (the seller) and MMSD (the buyer) will include the following provisions:
 - The Dam will be sold for \$1;
 - Parkland will remain in public custody;

- The Dam is sold under the condition that it will be removed by MMSD;
- The County will continue to operate and maintain the dam and the surrounding park land;
- The County will continue to provide park programming for Estabrook Park.
- Removal of the Dam – MMSD will be responsible for removing the Dam once it obtains the necessary DNR permits. MMSD has experience and expertise in taking on large scale projects. MMSD will seek grant funds to pay for removal but initially will allocate funds that would have been otherwise allocated for a different County project.

The letter concludes: “Again, it is our preference that the duly elected Board of Supervisors take a vote on Dam removal. Absent that action, the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County and MMSD are willing to partner on this important project to ensure the protection of public land and County taxpayer resources. This partnership will ensure that there is public oversight of the project and that no public land is affected.”

BACKGROUND:

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has declared the Estabrook Dam a public nuisance. Milwaukee County, as the owner and operator of the Dam, is required to abate the nuisance conditions created by the Dam. Although the Dam is located in the City of Milwaukee, its impact on our waterways, natural areas, and wildlife spans the City of Milwaukee, the Village of Shorewood, the City of Glendale, and beyond.

Right now it will cost at least \$4.1 million to repair the Dam, which is \$600,000 more than the County has available in the budget for this project. That number doesn’t include ongoing maintenance costs for operation of the Dam. In contrast, removal would be a one-time cost of \$1.7 million, most of which could be covered by grants.

In addition to being the better financial option, removing the Dam would restore the river to a more natural-looking and free-flowing condition, and also eliminate an eyesore that invites constant graffiti, litter, and unsafe conditions. Some of the things that are continually found in the river because of the Dam include old tires, empty prescription pill bottles, beer cans, Styrofoam cups, and other garbage. Repairing the Dam won’t solve this problem.

As well, both the County’s Office of Emergency Management and the City of Glendale's Certified Flood Manager have recommended removal of the Dam as in the best interest of public safety. Should the Dam fail, it could cause significant harm to property upriver and create unsafe conditions that put people at risk.

Dam removal has wide support around the county, for both environmental and economic reasons. Because there is a broad consensus in support of removing the Dam, along with a wealth of scientific research that supports the environmental benefits of Dam removal, in 2014, 2015, and again this July, the county executive has requested that the County Board take action to change the County’s policy from costly Dam repair to Dam removal.

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